

CHURCH STUFF

(A newsletter for Catholic cadets)

Week of 18 May, 2003

To my Catholic brothers and sisters in the Corps:

This will be the last newsletter for the year. You'll soon be shutting down your computers and packing them away.

I want to thank all of you who have played such active roles in the Catholic Program this year.

I also want to thank all of you for your continued friendship. It's meant a lot to me, and I wish you only the very best for the coming summer. May God guide your steps during whatever the summer brings your way. May He keep you safe and whole and bring you safely through the many roads you'll travel over the next three months.

If you're a FIRSTIE, my wish for you is that you'll experience confidence and a sense of fulfillment in the career which is about to unfold before you. May you retain confidence in yourself, in your powers and your talent...and in the constant Presence of God in your lives.

May God keep you safe in His powerful embrace.

And now, back to the present...

In the midst of the coming slavery of TERM-ENDS, let's not forget that this is the Easter-Pentecost season in the Church.

Jesus is RISEN and is now beyond time-and-space; the Apostles become "changed men" by the power of the Holy Spirit; and the world is introduced to something brand-new.

Are you part of it or just an onlooker?

Can you pray in the following words?

Lord,
send Your gift of SPIRIT to me.

Touch me
with TRUTH that burns like fire,
with BEAUTY that moves me like the wind;
and SET ME FREE...

FREE to try new ways of living,
FREE to forgive myself and others,
FREE to love and laugh and sing,
FREE to lay aside my burden of security,
FREE to join the battle for justice and peace,
FREE to see and listen and wonder again
at the gracious mystery of things and persons.

FREE to be,
to give,

to receive,
to rejoice as a child of Your SPIRIT.

Let me live life as it ought to be lived...
without FEAR,
without RESENTMENT,
without BLAME,
without HATRED.

Touch me with Your SPIRIT
so that I may REALLY live.

Best wishes as you enter TERM-END time. May God give you understanding and good recall.

AN EASTER THOUGHT:

RESURRECTION POWER:

Standing on a London street corner,
the English writer GK Chesterton was approached by a reporter.
“Sir, I understand that you recently became a Catholic.
May I ask you a question?”
Chesterton replied: “Certainly!”
The reporter went on: “What would you do
if the Risen Christ were standing behind you
at this very moment?”
Chesterton looked the reporter squarely in the eye and said:
“He is.”
And this is the most real fact about our life:
The Jesus who walked the roads of Judea and Galilee
is the One who stands beside us.
The Christ of history is the Christ of faith.

The Gospel proclaims a hidden power
in the living presence of the Risen Christ.
For me, summoning the courage to say YES
to the present risen-ness of Jesus Christ
is the most radical demand of the Christian faith.
The YES is scary because it is so personal.
In desolation and abandonment, in the death of a loved one,
in loneliness and fear,
in the awareness of the “pharisee” in all of us,
YES is not a word to be spoken frivolously.

This YES is an act of faith, a wholehearted cry of confidence
that my faith in Jesus provides security

not only in the face of death
but in the face of my own malice,
and it must be said not just once
but repeated over and over
in the ever-changing landscape of life.

And how does the life-giving Spirit of the Risen Lord manifest itself?
In our willingness to stand fast.
In our refusal to run away
and escape into self-destructive behavior.
RESURRECTION POWER enables us to confront untamed emotions,
to accept pain,
and in the process we discover that we are not alone,
that we are more than we previously imagined.

As Etty Hilesun, a Dutch Jew who died at Auschwitz in 1943, wrote:
we are able to safeguard “that little piece of God in ourselves”.
We make it through the night.
Darkness gives way to the light of morning.

Taken from “Abba’s Child”
by Brendan Manning

THINGS CATHOLICS CAN DO:

FOR FIRSTIES

The annual BACCALAUREATE MASS will be held
at the Chapel on Thursday, 29 May, at 1900.
Uniform = India Whites
There are no admission tickets; seating is “first-come,
first-served”.

DID YOU KNOW?

THE WORD “EASTER”:

In almost every language except English, the name for “Easter” is some form of the word “Passover” (for example, “Pasch”, from the Hebrew word “pesach” for “Passover”).

When Christianity arrived in the countries of northern Europe, the feast received a new name from the Teutonic people, and that name is used by English-speakers today: Easter.

At one time, it was thought that the name came from an Anglo-Saxon spring-goddess, Eostre (the Catholic monk-historian Bede the Venerable, who died in AD 735, thought that this was the case).

But there is some doubt that there ever was such a goddess’ name.
The more probable explanation comes from a misunderstanding.

During Easter Week, the newly-baptized wore WHITE garments for the whole week after Easter as a symbol of their new identities.

The Latin word for “white” is “alba”.

The speakers of Old High German took this not to refer to clothing but to the dawn.

Their word for “dawn” was “eostarun”.

For them, Christ was like the sun that rises at dawn in the East.

Hence, from their word “eostarun”, we get the name “Easter”.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

...every member of the Corps, as we approach Term-Ends.

...any cadet who feels especially pressured at this time.

...the Firsties, who are preparing for Graduation Week.

...all our graduates, relatives and friends who are serving in Iraq...and their families.

...all our military personnel throughout the world...and their families.

...the wounded and maimed on both sides...and their families.

...the dead on both sides...and their families.

...the innocent non-combatant victims...and their families.

...the intention of peace throughout the Middle East and the building of a just society in Iraq.

GOT A QUESTION?

Q: Father, what are the Dead Sea scrolls, and what do they mean for Scripture study.

A: The Dead Sea scrolls are the remains of a library.

No one knows whose library it was or its original location.

The documents themselves date from as early as 250 BC and as late as AD 68.

They were found quite by accident in the period between 1947 and 1956 by Bedouin shepherds in caves near the Dead Sea in Israel. The first discovery was in 1947, when a shepherd found seven scrolls, plus fragments. When the significance was realized, more searches were conducted, and by 1956, 10 other caves were found, containing not only scrolls and fragments but also pottery with inscriptions.

It became clear to scholars that these were the remains of a library, but as I said, there was no indication of where the whole collection came from. Some have concluded that the documents were written in a Jewish religious settlement that was nearby; it was called Qumran, and it was very much like a monastery. Other people feel that this library was brought to the caves from Jerusalem for safekeeping before the Romans attacked and destroyed the city in AD 70.

The term “scroll” is a bit deceptive. Only a small portion of the discovery is actual scrolls; most is fragments, and some are no larger than a fingernail. Still, after years of analysis, scholars have identified 800 separate manuscripts.

These can be divided into biblical (about 25%) and non-biblical material. Every book in the Hebrew Bible is represented, except for the Book of Esther. There is no “New Testament” material, of course.

The non-biblical material is hymns, bible commentaries, wisdom literature, letters, legal texts...and there’s even a set of hidden-treasure instructions on a scroll made

from copper foil.

The “treasure map” reveals 64 locations of buried treasure, giving a description of what’s buried, plus its value. Conservative estimates have placed the whole treasure at 60 tons of precious metal, and scholars think that, if real, this treasure could have easily been the contents of the Temple Treasury, hidden away when the Roman army appeared in Galilee, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.

To give you some idea of what the Bible scholars were facing, Cave #4 had over 500 manuscripts in it, but they were all in tatters. Not a single scroll was intact, and estimates claimed that there were 15,000 fragments that had to be pieced together. In effect, they had to assemble 500 jigsaw puzzles...with 90% of the pieces missing.

Even though there’s nothing in the collection from what we call the “New Testament”, the Dead Sea scrolls are immensely valuable for an understanding of the Old Testament. On the basis of the scrolls, many parts of the Old Testament have become more clear, and some parts have even been re-written, based on the findings in the scrolls themselves.

And secondly, one can get a much clearer picture of the world in which Jesus and the early Christians lived, and this will make portions of the New Testament easier to understand and appreciate. For example, the scrolls paint a fascinating picture of the Pharisees and help to understand a lot about how and why they agreed and disagreed with Jesus.

Anyway, this would be the basic outline of what they are and how they fit into biblical scholarship. It’s a really intriguing topic, and I hope your curiosity was piqued.

THEOLOGY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD KNOW:

WEAKNESS:

This may not seem very attractive to you, especially since we at West Point live in a “warrior culture”, but WEAKNESS and VULNERABILITY play a central role in understanding the life of Jesus AND in trying to imitate that life.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul quotes God as saying the following to him:

My grace is sufficient for you,
for power is made perfect in WEAKNESS...

and then Paul draws the following conclusion:

I will rather boast most clearly of my WEAKNESSES
that the power of Christ may dwell with me.

The kind of WEAKNESS that he’s talking about is not the human weakness that easily gives in to temptation.

And it’s not the “weakness of the flesh”, as opposed to the “strength of the spirit”.

What is meant is the willingness of the follower of Jesus to GIVE UP one’s personal strength and power in order to replace them with the strength of God.

In their versions of the Beatitudes, both Matthew (5:3-12) and Luke (6:20-26) present the following categories of “weak and defenseless” people:

- those who are defenseless;
- those who are broken by human tragedy;
- those who sorrow and mourn;

- those persecuted by evil forces;
- those who are belittled;
- those who are rendered insignificant by the strong
and robust of this world.

Jesus called such people BLESSED.

This goes against every value of “the world”, but he insisted on it...even to the extent of giving himself into the hands of evil so as to overcome evil.

So, in his infancy, in his agony, in his death, we see him choosing WEAKNESS for the sake of God’s will...and God rewarding him by RAISING HIM UP.

In his Letter to the Philippians, Paul quotes the words of an ancient Christian hymn. He recommends that his readers follow the example of Christ:

Have among yourselves the same attitude
that Jesus had.

Though he was in the form of God,
he did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped.

Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave
and coming in human likeness.

He humbled himself
and became obedient to death,
death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
that is above every name.

So that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bend...

Philippians 2:6-11

Jesus refused the kind of power that controls and dominates.

He accepted weakness and vulnerability in his life.

And he gave himself over to the power of his Father...so that he could enter the lives of others at their most vulnerable point.

Catholic spiritual life cannot be based in any way on control, domination or manipulation.

But following the example of Jesus as presented in the Scriptures, we should cultivate care, compassion, self-sacrifice, reciprocity and mutuality.

These are the only STRENGTHS that can actually have an effect in the world.

UNSOLICITED SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:

“The Lord has written
the promise of RESURRECTION
not in books alone
but in every leaf in Spring-time.”

Martin Luther

And that's the way it is, a day like all days, filled with those events that alter and illuminate our time...

and YOU ARE THERE!!

And for the summer:

“May God bless you and keep you.

May He turn His face toward you
and be gracious to you.

May He look upon you kindly
and give you His peace.”

Numbers 6:24-26

Take care of yourselves!

Woodie